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ART. II.—*Essays on the Puránas. I. By Professor HORACE HAYMAN WILSON, Director of the Royal Asiatic Society.*

Read 16th of April, 1836.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

THE earliest inquiries into the religion, chronology, and history of the Hindús, ascertained that there existed a body of writings especially devoted to those subjects, from which it was sanguinely anticipated much valuable and authentic information would be derived. These were the Puránas of Sanscrit literature, collections which, according to the definition of a Purána agreeably to Sanscrit writers, should treat of the creation and renovation of the universe, the division of time, the institutes of law and religion, the genealogies of the patriarchal families, and the dynasties of kings; and they, therefore, offered a prospect of our penetrating the obscurity in which the origin and progress of the Hindú social system had so long been enveloped. A formidable difficulty, however, presented itself in the outset, arising from the voluminous extent of this branch of the literature of the Hindús, and the absence of all facilities for acquiring a knowledge of its nature. The Puránas are eighteen in number, besides several works of a similar class, called *Upa*, or minor, *Puránas*. The former alone comprehend, it is asserted, and the assertion is not very far from the truth, four hundred thousand slokas, or sixteen hundred thousand lines, a quantity which any individual European scholar could scarcely expect to peruse with care and attention, unless his whole time were devoted exclusively for very many years, to the task. Nor was any plan, short of the perusal of the whole, likely to furnish satisfactory means of judging of their general character: few of them are furnished with anything in the shape of an index, or summary of contents, and none of them conform to any given arrangement; so that to know with accuracy what any one contains, it is necessary to read the entire work. The immensity of the labour seems to have deterred Sanscrit students from effecting even what was feasible, the publication or translation of one or two of the principal Puránas, and to the present day not one of them is accessible to the European public.

The plan adopted by Sir William Jones and other Sanscrit scholars, in order to come at the contents of the Puránas with the least possible waste of their own time and labour, was the employ-

ment of Pandits to extract such passages as, from their report, appeared most likely to illustrate Hindú mythology, chronology, and history: and they themselves then translated the extracts, or drew up a summary of the subjects to which they related. The objections to this process are sufficiently obvious. The Pandits themselves are but imperfectly acquainted with the Puráñas; they rarely read more than one or two, as the Bhágavata and Vishnu, and accordingly the extracts furnished by them are limited mostly to those authorities, especially to the former. As the selection of the extracts was necessarily left to their judgment in a great measure, there was no security that they made the best choice they might have done, even from the few works they consulted. Even if the passages were well chosen they were still unsatisfactory, for it was impossible to know whether they might not be illustrated or modified by what preceded or what followed; and however judiciously and accurately furnished, therefore, they were still but meagre substitutes for the entire composition.

But a still more serious inconvenience attended this mode of procedure. It was not always easy to determine whether the extracts were authentic. Not to describe what was sought for, left the Pandit at a loss what to supply; to indicate a desire to find any particular information was to tempt him to supply it, even if he fabricated it for the purpose. Of this the well-known case of Colonel Wilford is a remarkable instance. The inquirer, under these circumstances, was placed in a very uncomfortable dilemma, as he went to work upon materials which might either say too little or too much—might leave him without the only information that was essential, or might embarrass him with an abundance by which he was afraid to benefit.

Detached portions of the Puráñas were also of little or no value in another important respect. They threw little light upon the literary history of those works, upon their respective date, and consequent weight as authorities. It is true that none of the Puráñas bear any dates, but most of them offer occasionally internal evidence of their relative order to one another, or to other compositions, or to circumstances and events from which some conjecture of their antiquity may be formed. Now if there be much difference in these respects amongst the Puráñas, if some be much more modern than others, if some be of very recent composition, they cannot be of equal weight with regard to the subjects they describe, or with relation to the past social and religious condition of the people of India. How far, however, they are the writings of various and distant periods,—

how far they indicate this dissimilarity of date, cannot be guessed at from a few detached passages, constituting a very insignificant portion of a very small part of their number.

Unsatisfactory as to their information, questionable as to their authenticity, and undetermined as to their authority, Extracts from the Puránas are yet the only sources on which any reliance can be placed for accurate accounts of the notions of the Hindús. The statements which they contain may be of different ages, and relate to different conditions, but as far as they go they are correct pictures of the times to which they belong. Recourse to oral authority, to the conversational information of ignorant and ill-instructed individuals, which constitutes the basis of most of the descriptions of the Hindús, published in Europe, is a very unsafe guide, and has led writers of undoubted talent and learning into the most absurd mistakes and misrepresentations. From these they would be preserved by adhering to the Pauranic writers; but a full and correct view of the mythology of the Hindús, of their religion as it still exists, and of much of their real history, is only to be expected when the Puránas shall have been carefully examined and compared, and their character and chronology shall have been as far as possible ascertained.

In order to effect the latter objects, as far as they might be practicable without the actual translation of the entire works, I adopted, several years ago, a plan for the particular examination of the contents of all the Puránas, which was carried into execution during the latter years of my residence in India. Engaging the services of several able Pandits, I employed them to prepare a minute index of each of the Puránas. This was not a mere catalogue of chapters, or sections, or heads of subjects, but a recapitulation of the subjects of every page and almost every stanza in each page; being, in fact, a copious abstract in the safer form of an index. It is necessary to call attention to this part of my task, the more particularly that it has been misconceived, and has been supposed to mean nothing more than such a summary as sometimes accompanies a Purána in the form of a list of the divisions of the work, and a brief notice of the topic of each. The indices prepared for me were of a very different description, as the inspection of them will at once exhibit.¹ These indices were drawn up in Sanscrit. To convert them into English I employed several native young men, educated in the

¹ Besides copies in my own possession, one set was deposited in the library of the Asiatic Society of Calcutta, and another is placed in the library of the East India Company. The index of the Mahábhárata occupies four folio volumes.

Hindú college, and well conversant with our language, and to them the Pandits explained the Summary which they had compiled. The original and translation were examined by myself, and corrected wherever necessary. When any particular article appeared to promise interest or information, I had that translated in detail, or translated it myself; in the former case, revising the translation with the original. In this manner I collected a series of indices, abstracts, and translations of all the Puránas with one or two unimportant exceptions, and of the Mahábhárata and Rámáyana, from which, if I am not much mistaken, a correct notion of the substance and character of these works may now be safely formed.

The shape in which these abstracts exist is, however, too voluminous and unsystematic to admit of their being published, or of being used with advantage, except by persons engaged in the especial study of their subjects. In order to fit them for the perusal of those who wish to learn, conveniently as well as correctly, what the Puránas have to teach, it is necessary to reduce the summaries of their contents to a connected and accessible form, and to indicate the circumstances which illustrate their purport, authenticity, and date. I have attempted to do this in a few scattered instances; and abstracts of the Vishnu, Váyu, Agni, and Bráhma Váivarta Puránas have been published in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. I propose, however, now to go regularly through the whole series, in the order in which the Puránas are commonly arranged, and begin accordingly with the Bráhma Purána, which stands at the head of all the lists. In this, as in any other abstract which I may offer to the Society, I wish it to be understood that I do not trust solely to the index, or the partial translation which I have described, however satisfied I may be of their general fidelity. They are of great use as auxiliaries and guides, but the original is constantly before me, and nothing is stated except upon reference to the authority of the text. I trust, therefore, that my abstracts may lay claim to as much confidence as anything, except actual translation, can be considered to deserve.

I. BRÁHMA PURÁNA.

THE Bráhma Purána, or Purána of Brahmá, is the first of the eighteen Puránas, according to all the authorities, except the Pádma Purána, which, in the Pátála Khanda or section, arrogates precedence to itself, and gives the second place to the Bráhma. This rather confirms than invalidates the usual specification, and the Bráhma Purána may be regarded as the earliest of the series, at least in the estimation of the Pauranic writers. According to Bálambhatta, in his Commentary on the Mitákshará, it is consequently known by the name of *Adi*, or *First Purána*. It is also sometimes designated as the *Saura Purána*, as in part it treats of the worship of Súra, the sun. Authorities generally agree in stating the extent of the Bráhma Purána to be ten thousand stanzas. The Agni Purána makes it twenty-five thousand, but is single in the enumeration. The actual number, in two copies consulted on the present occasion, is about seven thousand five hundred. There is, indeed, a work called the *Uttara Khanda*, or last section of the Bráhma Purána, which contains about three thousand stanzas more, but it is commonly met with detached; and whether it be properly a part of the Purána to which it professes to belong, admits of question.

The first verses of the Bráhma Purána, forming an address to Vishnu, under the appellations of Hari and Purushottama, sufficiently declare its sectarian bias, and indicate it to be a Vaishnava work. It is not, however, included, in the classification of the Pádma Purána, amongst the Vaishnava works, but is referred to the Sákta class, in which the worship of Sakti, the personified female principle, is more particularly inculcated, and in which the Rájasa property, or property of passion, is predominant.¹

After the invocation, it is said that the Rishis, seated at Naimisháranya, were visited by Lomaharshana the Síta, and the disciple of Vyása, to whom in particular the Puránas were imparted. The sages ask him to repeat to them an account of the origin, existence, and destination of the universe. Accordingly, he narrates to them the Bráhma Purána, as it was repeated, he says, by Brahmá, in reply to a similar request which was once made by Daksha, and other patriarchs. In this statement we have a variation, of some importance, perhaps, to the authenticity of the text, for the Mátasya Purána asserts, that the Bráhma Purána was communicated by Brahmá to Maríchi, who, although a patriarch, is a different person

¹ Asiatic Researches, vol. xvi., p. 10, *note*.

from Daksha, and if accurately designated by the *Mátsya*, shows, at least, a different reading in the copy consulted by the compiler of that work, and in those which are here followed.

The first chapter of the *Purána* describes the creation, which it attributes to *Náráyana* or *Vishnu*, as one with *Brahmá* or *Iswara*. He makes the universe from the indiscrete cause which is one with matter and spirit, and the developement of which then proceeds conformably to the *Sáṅkhya* philosophy. The first product from *Pradhána*, the chief principle or base of all substance, is *Mahat*, the great or intellectual principle, whence proceeds *Ahankára*, consciousness, or individuality. From this are produced the rudiments of the elements, and from them are developed the gross or perceptible elements, of which water is the menstruum of the rest, and first sensible ingredient in the formation of the world. The appearance of *Brahmá* on the waters, and the actual manifestation of the system of the universe, are described in the same manner as in *Manu*, and partly in the same words. Indeed, in this, and in all the early as well as some of the latter chapters of this *Purána*, the words employed seem to be common to several of the *Puráṇas*, as will be particularly pointed out when we come to the parallel passages of the *Vishnu Purána*; and they appear to have been taken from some older work or works, from which the present *Puráṇas* are, probably, in part at least derived.

The birth of the first *Manu* *Swáyambhuva* and his wife *Satarúpá*, and their descendants to the origin of *Daksha*, from the *Práchetasas* by *Márishá*, are next described, and are followed by a brief notice of the birth of *Daksha's* daughters, and the multiplication of beings by the intercourse of the sexes. The next chapter gives detailed accounts of the posterity of *Daksha's* daughters, especially of those wedded to *Kasyapa*, comprising gods, demigods, demons, men, animals, and plants; or, in a word, all creatures, real or fabulous. In the third chapter occurs the history of *Prithu*; and in the fourth, an account of the fourteen *Manwantaras*, or reigns of the *Manus*. We have then a particular account of the origin of *Vaivaswata*, the reigning *Manu*, and of his descendants, constituting the solar dynasty, or line of princes descended from the Sun, stopping in one copy with *Vajranábha*, but in the other proceeding to *Vrihadbala*, with whom the series usually closes. The princes of the lunar dynasty are then detailed to the period of the great war; and in the account of *Krishna*, the legend of his being accused of purloining a wonderful jewel is narrated at length. In all these details, which occupy fifteen chapters, the *Bráhma Purána* presents

the same legends as are found in other Puránas, except that they are in general more concisely told.

The same may be said of the next chapters, which contain brief descriptions of the divisions of the earth, and of the several Dwípas of which it consists, of Pátála, or the regions under the earth, and of the different hells: of the spheres above the earth, and the size and distances of the planets and constellations, and the influence of the sun and moon in producing rain and fertility. These extend to the twentieth chapter.

Part of the twentieth chapter takes up the subject of Tírthas, or places to which pilgrimage should be performed, of which a few only are particularised, and the list is interrupted by a short geographical description of Bhárata Varsha, or India Proper, its mountains, rivers, inhabitants, and merits. The portion which may be considered as characteristic of this Purána then commences, and relates particularly to the sanctity of Utkala, or Orissa, arising, in the first instance, from the worship of the Sun, in various forms, in that country, the description of which, including legendary accounts of the origin of the twelve 'Adityas, or children of Aditi, the wife of Kasyapa, and the story of Vaivaswata's birth from the Sun by his wife Sanjñá, extends to the twenty-eighth chapter.

The sanctity of Utkala continues, however, to constitute the subject of the book, forming the loosely connecting thread of a variety of legends, the scene of which is laid in the province. Thus we have a description of the forest in Utkala called Ekámra, which is considered most holy from its being the favourite haunt of Siva; and this suggests the legend of Daksha's sacrifice, the birth of Umá as the daughter of Himálaya, and her marriage with Siva, the destruction and renovation of the Deity of Love, the disrespect shown by Daksha to Siva, and the punishment inflicted by the ministers of that deity upon the patriarch and his abettors. The Ekámra wood it appears was the place to which Siva repaired after these transactions, and hence its holiness. It is so called, it is said, from a mango-tree (Amra) which flourished there in a former kalpa or great age. According to the description that follows the legends above mentioned in great detail, its circuit was filled with gardens, and tanks, and palaces, and temples, the latter dedicated to various Lingas; and it comprised many Tírthas, or holy spots, as Viraja, Kapila, and others. Connected with it also was the tract sacred to Vishnu, or Purushottama Kshetra, which is next described; and then follows an account of Indradyumna, king of Avantí, by whom

the temple of Vishnu was first erected at this spot; and the image of Jagannátha, made for him by Viswakarman, originally set up. The proceedings of Indradyumna, on this occasion, are very fully narrated, and the account extends to the forty-sixth chapter.

The text then passes rather abruptly to a conversation between Vishnu and the sage Márkandeya, at the season of the destruction of the world, in which Vishnu tells the Muní that he is identical with all things, and that Siva is the same as himself. The especial object of the legend is, however, to account for the sanctity of a pool at Purushottama Kshetra, called the lake of Márkandeya, from its being attached to a temple with a Linga, erected by the Muní with the permission of Vishnu, bathing in which tank is a work of merit. We have then notices of other pools, and of trees and temples, with legends concerning their origin, and directions for bathing, praying and worshipping at various shrines. Copious instructions are given for the adoration of Purushottama or Jagannátha, Balaráma and Subhadrá; and a legend of the image of the former is introduced, in which it is said, that it was originally made for Indra, but carried off from his capital, Amarávatí, by Rávana; that on the conquest of Lanká by Ráma, he left it with Vibhíshana, and that it was presented by him to Samudra (Ocean), by whom it was set up on the coast of Orissa.

The advantages of living and dying at Purushottama Kshetra are then expatiated upon, and it is said that many Rishis, or sages, resided there at the recommendation of Brahmá. Amongst them was the sage named Kandu, and the mention of his name leads to a story of Pramlochá, the nymph of heaven, who was sent by Indra to interrupt Kandu's austerities, but became enamoured of him, and sojourned with him for many ages upon earth. This story was translated by the late M. Langles, and the translation forms the first article of the "*Journal Asiatique*" of the Asiatic Society of Paris.

The praises of Váśudeva, or Krishna, introduce an account of some of the Avatáras of Vishnu, of Brahmá's origin from him, and the production and death of the demons Madhu and Kaitabha. All this, however, is but preliminary to a narrative of the birth and actions of Krishna, including the usual legends of Balaráma, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha, and ending with the death of Krishna and the destruction of Dwáráká. These subjects extend from the sixty-fifth to the eighty-sixth chapter, and are, not only in their purport, but in their very language, the same as those which are found in the fifth book of the Vishnu Purána.

A series of chapters then ensues on *Srāddhas*, or obsequial sacrifices, on ceremonial and moral observances, on the duties of the several castes, and on the merit of worshipping Vishnu, especially at the *Ekādasī*, or eleventh day of the moon's increase, which topic is illustrated by several insipid legends. These subjects occupy sixteen chapters. We then have a particular detail of the divisions of time, and the duration and influence of the four *Yugas*, or ages, introductory to a description of the degeneracy of mankind in the last, or *Kali* age, and the periodical destruction of the world.

When speaking of destruction, *Vyāsa*, to whom the character of narrator has been transferred in the course of the work, *Loma-harshana* only repeating what his master had formerly said, describes absolute and final destruction, or the eternal cessation of existent things, by the exemption of an individual himself from all existence; and this leads to a question from the sages as to the nature of *Yoga*, or the practice of that abstraction by which final liberation is secured. In one copy of this *Purāna* the answer is suspended by the abrupt insertion and evident interpolation of several chapters, in which an account of the solar dynasty of princes, from *Vaivaswata* to *Rāma*, is repeated; and some notice is taken of the origin of *Soma*, or the moon. These chapters are, however, clearly out of place, and in another copy they are wanting, *Vyāsa* proceeding correctly to describe the means of obtaining emancipation. With this view he gives a sketch of the *Sāṅkhya* system of philosophy, first in his own words, and then in the words of the *Muni Vasishtha*, as addressed formerly to King *Janaka*; their conversation also contains a description of the practices of the *Yogī*, as suppression of breath, and particular postures, intended to withdraw his senses more completely from external objects. After describing the condition of the *Sātwika*, or perfect man, attained by these means, and his becoming identified with *Vāsudeva* or *Krishna*, the work concludes with a panegyric upon itself, and dwells on the vast benefits derived by all classes of men from perusing it, or hearing it read.

That this summary of the *Brāhma Purāna* faithfully represents its contents as it is ordinarily met with, may be inferred from the concurrence of the two copies consulted, one belonging to myself, and one to Mr. Colebrooke. In the Catalogue of the Sanscrit Manuscripts in the Royal Library of Paris also, No. V. of the *Devanagari MSS.*, although erroneously denominated *Rāma Sahasra Nāma*, "the thousand names of *Rāma*," an extract from the *Brāhma*

Purána, is a portion of that work, and comprehends the chapters which relate to the worship of the sun, and the sanctity of Purushottama Kshetra, concurring, therefore, as far as it goes, with the copies here analyzed. It is nevertheless obvious, that such a Bráhma Purána as has been here described, cannot have any pretension to be considered as an ancient work, as the earliest of the Puránas, or even as a Purána at all. The first few chapters may have belonged to a genuine and an ancient composition, and some of the later sections may be regarded as not incompatible with the character of a Purána, but the greater portion of the work belongs to the class of Máhátmyas, legendary and local descriptions of the greatness or holiness of particular temples, or individual divinities. The Bráhma Purána as we have it, is, for the most part, the Máhátmya or legend of the sanctity of Utkala or Orissa.

Although the holiness of Utkala is owing especially to its including in its limits Purushottama Kshetra, the country between the Vaitarani and Rasakoila rivers, within which, on a low range of sand-hills at Puri, stands the celebrated temple of Jagannáth; yet the Bráhma Purána also gives due honour to two other forms of Hindú superstition, to the worship of the sun, and that of Mahádeo in the same province, and this may assist us to some conjecture of the date of the work in its present form. The great seat of the worship of Siva called Ekámra Kánana in our text, is now known as Bhuvaneswara, a ruined city consisting entirely of deserted and dismantled towers and temples, sacred to the worship of Mahádeo.¹ The great temple was erected by Lalit Indra Kesari, Raja of Orissa, and was completed A. D. 657. At what period the worship declined, and the temples fell into decay, no where appears, but these events were no doubt connected with the ascendancy of the adoration of Vishnu or Jagannáth, which probably began to flourish in its greatest vigour subsequently to the twelfth century.

The worship of the Sun seems to have enjoyed a more modern prosperity, for the remarkable temple at Kanárka, known to navigators as the Black Pagoda, was built by Rájá Langora Narsingh Deo, A. D. 1241. It seems to have disputed for a season pre-eminence with the homage paid to Jagannáth, for the temple of the latter divinity was constructed only forty-three years prior to the Black Pagoda, or in A. D. 1198. Jagannáth however triumphed over his rivals, and the shrine of the Sun, and the temples of

¹ Stirling. Account of Orissa Proper or Cuttack, Asiatic Researches, vol. xvi. The local particulars in the text are entirely derived from this admirable document.

Mahádeo, are now alike in a state of ruin : this could not have been the case when the Bráhma Purána celebrated their glories, and they would appear, at the time when the Purána was compiled, to have divided the veneration of the Hindús with their more fortunate competitor. The internal evidence which the work offers, therefore, renders it exceedingly probable, that it was composed in the course of the thirteenth or fourteenth century, or after the worship of Jagannátha predominated, but before Siva and the Sun had fallen into utter disrepute.

The work which is called the Uttara Khanda, or "Last portion" of the Bráhma Purána, is, as has been observed, always met with in a detached form, and as an independent composition. The subjects of which it treats, are also of a character wholly dissimilar from those of the Bráhma Purána, and it is very obvious that there is no connexion between the two. If there be any Púrva Khanda, or prior section of the Bráhma Purána, of which the Uttara Khanda is a continuation, it must be something very different from the work of which the preceding summary has been given.

The Uttara Khanda of the Bráhma Purána consists of thirty-seven chapters, containing about three thousand stanzas. It is repeated by Saunaka to Satánika, as it was formerly narrated by Agastya to Supratíka, a sage. It so far merits the denomination of Bráhma Purána, that it has Brahmá for its hero : commencing with his incestuous passion for Saraswatí, and the birth of a son, Sumridíka, in consequence. Sumridíka being offended with his parent, creates, by arduous penance, the brood of Asuras or Titans, by whom the gods are defeated, and Brahmá is expelled from heaven. Brahmá; however, by propitiating Siva, is restored to his dignity and power, and employs Viswakarma, to build for him the city Drisyapura, on the banks of the Balajá river, the glory and sanctity of which stream it is the main purport of the work to panegyricize.

The Uttara Khanda of the Bráhma Purána, then, is nothing more than a Mábátmya of the Balajá river ; but where the Balajá river flows, or where the city of Drisyapura is situated, are matters to be decided only by future inquiry. The work itself affords no geographical intimations, except that the scene of Brahmá's penance and sacrifice, in propitiation of Siva, and of various forms of his goddess, Deví or Umá, is laid in the north. Drisyapura means merely the "beautiful city;" and other appellations given to it, are derived from legends peculiar to this work, and afford no help in its verification. The Balajá river is called also the Bráhma hrada, "the lake of Brahmá," from his having performed penance on its borders ; and

Bánanásá, "the destroyer of arrows," having cured the gods when wounded by the shafts of the demons. As personified, the stream is on one occasion identified with Nandini or Sákambharí Deví, and the latter goddess is the tutelary divinity of Sambher, and other places in Rajputána.¹ The lake of Brahmá might be thought to refer to the celebrated lake of Pushkara, where is still the only shrine known in India to be dedicated to Brahmá; but the Balajá is always described as a river, a great river, a Mahánadí, not a lake: the name means "Strength-born," the stream being produced by the power of the gods; an appellation that offers no aid in discovering its direction, and no such name occurs in the ancient or modern geography of India. In Bánanásá, however, we have in all probability the original of Banás, or Bunass, a river rising in Marwar, and flowing into the Chambal; and the Uttara Khanda of the Bráhma Purána is therefore most probably, the local legend of some temple in Central India, which is now in ruins, and the memory of which has passed away. There is nothing in the record that survives, of interest or importance, as it is made up chiefly of accounts of battles between the gods and demons, and praises of the holiness of the river, intermixed with puerile legends of local invention, and thinly interspersed with others belonging to the general body of Pauranic fiction.

The Uttara Khanda of the Bráhma Purána, is not to be confounded with the Brahmottara Khanda, a section of the Skánda Purána.

¹ Tod's Rajast'hán, vol. ii. p. 445.